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**FORMER STATE DIVISION OF PAROLE AND PROBATION EMPLOYEE
PLEADS GUILTY TO EXTORTION**

Baltimore, Maryland - Rod J. Rosenstein, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that today Yolanda Renee Johnson, age 33, of Baltimore, Maryland, who was a Drinking Driver Monitor in the Maryland Division of Parole and Probation's Drinking and Driving Monitoring program, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Court Judge J. Frederick Motz to one count of extorting money under color of official right from persons under her supervision.

The investigation began when several individuals on probation under Johnson's supervision complained to the Federal Bureau of Investigation that they were being blackmailed by Johnson. According to a statement of facts provided to the court, the defendant admitted soliciting money from probationers in exchange for special consideration, such as agreeing to reduce their level of supervision or terminating it altogether. In her capacity as a monitor, Johnson supervised probationers convicted of driving while intoxicated and driving while under the influence of alcohol. To insure that the probationers under her supervision successfully completed the terms of their probation, Johnson's job responsibilities included weekly or monthly in-person contact with probationers to ensure compliance with directives of the courts and licensing restrictions of the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration; verification of probationers' attendance at alcohol treatment and education programs; verification of probationers' abstinence from driving and use of alcohol or drugs; and requiring probationers to take urinalysis or breathalyzer tests. The purpose of supervision under the Drinking and Driving Monitor Program was to alleviate the threat that drunk drivers pose to public safety and to provide a viable alternative to incarceration.

At this morning's proceeding, Johnson admitted to soliciting money between December 2003 and August 2004 from 23 probationers convicted of drinking and driving offenses. Approximately 20 of those probationers paid her between \$100 and \$325 to have their court-mandated probationary conditions reduced or curtailed. The defendant further admitted that her extortive acts greatly diminished the chances of reducing the recidivist rate among DWI offenders who were under the

supervision of the Drinking and Driving Monitor Program, which consequently placed the public's safety at risk.

United States Attorney Rosenstein said, "Government officials flagrantly violate the public trust when they abuse their power and demand personal benefits. I commend the probationers who did exactly what every citizen should do when a government employee solicits a bribe: report the extortion to the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

The maximum penalty for extortion under color of law is 20 years of imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine and three years of supervised release. The defendant's sentencing hearing is scheduled for September 15, 2005 at 9:00 a.m. The Office of the United States Attorney will seek a sentence that reflects the seriousness of the defendant's systematic corruption of her governmental office.

The prosecution is the result of a joint investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Baltimore County Police Department, the Internal Investigative Unit of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and the United States Attorney's Office. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Martin Clarke.